

DEATH OF AN AMERICAN CITIZEN

Death Overseas

The Special Consular Services Unit (SCS) of the American Citizen Services Section can assist family and friends in the event of the death of an American Citizen in England and Wales. The SCS Unit can act as liaison in arranging the disposition of remains and help with forwarding personal effects. The family or legal representative must pay all funeral home charges, shipping costs of the remains and personal effects (if applicable). The SCS Unit will work with any funeral home selected by the family to ensure proper documentation for shipment of remains to the United States. The SCS Unit maintains a list of four funeral homes that are familiar with the international shipping requirement of human remains.

Even if no assistance is needed in making funeral arrangements, the death of an American citizen, whether resident or tourist, should be reported to the SCS Unit so that a Report of Death of an American Citizen Abroad can be issued. This document is necessary to settle legal and estate matters in the United States. The SCS Unit normally issues 20 copies of the Report, which is usually sufficient in number to settle matters in the United States. In order to assist with the preparation of this document you should refer to the form on the Embassy website at:

http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/uk/report_of_death_of_an_american_citizen_abroad.pdf

Disposition of Remains

The following general information is provided to assist families in their initial decisions. Indicated costs are **estimates**, based on deaths with no unusual circumstances and should be considered for guidance purposes only. These estimates also relate only to costs incurred in England and Wales (inclusive of shipping). United States funeral home costs will need to be added.

A. Requirement for autopsy (post mortem) in the event of sudden death

Under British law the coroner must order that an autopsy be conducted when there is reasonable cause to suspect that the deceased died from

- (a) violent or unnatural death; or
- (b) a sudden death of which the cause is unknown; or
- (c) the deceased died in prison or in such place or in such circumstances as to require a coroner's inquest.

B. When autopsy must be followed by Coroner's Inquest

There are three possible outcomes of the coroner's autopsy examination:

- (a) The cause of the sudden death is determined to be natural – in which case the coroner's jurisdiction ceases and there is no requirement for further inquiry

- (b) The cause of the sudden death is determined to be not natural (that is evidence is found that the death was violent or unnatural) – in which case the coroner must proceed to hold an inquest.
- (c) A cause of death is not disclosed (un-established) – in which case the coroner must proceed to hold an inquest

While the Inquest may be held several months after death, the coroner will issue the necessary papers to allow funeral arrangements to proceed usually within a few days of the autopsy.

C. Maximum period before interment

British law does not place a time limit within which burial must take place. Remains can be held free of charge at a public mortuary pending receipt of next-of-kin's instructions.

D. Registration of death

Under British law, if the coroner is not investigating a death, then the death must be registered within five days. If the death cannot be registered within five days then the registrar must be informed as soon as possible. In coroner's cases, the death will be automatically registered by the authorities once the inquest has been held.

E. Embalming

There is neither a time limit within which remains must be embalmed, nor a requirement for embalming of remains for export from the United Kingdom or import into the United States.

Next-of-kin are encouraged to consult their receiving funeral home to resolve any doubts about embalming, particularly if relatives wish to view the remains. Next-of-kin should advise the funeral home or the SCS Unit if, for religious or other reasons, the body should not be embalmed.

In cases of HIV/AIDS- related death, or other highly contagious diseases, embalming may not be always be possible and should be discussed with the selected funeral home. If embalming does proceed there may be additional costs for replacement of equipment.

F. Cremation

There is no time limit within which remains must be cremated

G. Coffins

Coffins/caskets are available that are suitable for cremation, local burial or international shipment of remains.

H. Exportation of remains from the United Kingdom

(1) Whole Remains: Whole remains must be contained in a zinc-lined, hermitically sealed coffin/casket. To facilitate the export of whole remains from the UK to the U.S., the Embassy prepares a Consular Mortuary Certificate. It provides the flight details and consignee and incorporates the following documents:

- (a) a certified copy of the local death certificate or the coroner's interim certificate when an inquest is pending;
- (b) an affidavit from the funeral director stating that the remains have been properly prepared and packed for shipment;
- (c) an embalming certificate, if appropriate; and
- (d) the coroner's "Out of England" certificate permitting the removal of the remains from the coroner's jurisdiction.

(2) Cremated Remains: Cremated remains may be exported if they are accompanied by a certified copy of the local death certificate, the cremation certificate and a statement from the crematorium or the funeral home confirming the urn contains only the ashes of the deceased. We recommend that airline passengers carrying cremated remains to the United States declare the nature of the package to UK and U.S. customs. It is also advisable that the urn be wooden to allow security screening at the airport.

I. Cost estimates

Charges shown are based on an exchange rate of \$1.80 = 1 British pound sterling.

I) Local burial - \$7200

Fees include collection and transportation of remains, funeral home charges, administrative fees, cost of private burial plot near London and a brief service with no mourners present. This can only be an approximate figure as the cost of burial plots varies immensely and there are often different prices for borough residents and non-residents.

II) Cremation and local disposal of ashes - \$2880

Fees include collection and transportation of remains, doctor's certificates, crematorium fee, administrative fees, brief service with no mourners present and scattering of ashes.

III) Cremation and air shipment of ashes - \$3420

As (II) above but also includes the collection of the ashes from the crematorium, packaging and forwarding to the consignee by air freight for collection from the airport.

IV) Preparation and shipment of whole remains (excluding airfreight costs) - \$2700

Preparation of remains for shipment, including local collection of remains, embalming, provision and preparation of a lightweight coffin in accordance with established United States and international standards for shipment;

administration of flight arrangements, preparation of all documentation, notification of consignee and delivery to the airport. **NB.** The U.S. funeral costs are not included in this estimate.

(V) Sample IATA airfreight charges based on an average of 140 kilos

London to Atlanta	\$1320
London to Chicago	\$1310
London to Denver	\$1535
London to Grand Forks	\$1560
London to Houston	\$1405
London to Los Angeles	\$1550
London to Miami	\$1345
London to New York	\$1175
London to Oklahoma	\$1410
London to Phoenix	\$1540
London to San Francisco	\$1545
London to Seattle	\$1545

J. Exhumation

Applications for exhumation must be made to the British Home Office. Exhumed remains and their original casket/coffin must be contained in an outer casket/coffin for shipment. Exhumations may be carried out only before the opening of the cemetery to the public, i.e. normally at dawn, Monday to Friday. The cemetery charges a fee to open the grave. If the death occurred a long time ago or the deceased died of an infectious disease the environmental health office would also be in attendance.

K. Remarks

The four funeral homes on the Embassy's list are all based in London. For deaths outside of London, an additional \$2.70 per mile is charged by the London companies to cover travel costs. For the list of homes see http://london.usembassy.gov/cons_new/acs/uk/funeral_directors.pdf [PDF].